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SUBJECT: AFTER THE APRIL 1 ELECTIONS: CAMBODIA'S POLITICAL  
PARTIES TAKE STOCK

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Discussions with political party sources suggest that Cambodia's parties are reviewing their political futures and respective strategies going into the 2008 national elections. The Sam Rainsy Party (SRP) is focused on uniting the non-ruling parties to face off against the CPP in 2008 but is leaving its options open; there are rumors that FUNCINPEC and the Ranariddh party are in discussions about a possible re-unification; the Ranariddh party continues to press for Ranariddh's return, and the CPP is quietly working to ensure that the ruling party loses no ground to the SRP in the lead up to the 2008 elections. Meanwhile, the NEC has announced the official results of the April 1 commune elections, having dismissed most complaints. The CPP won 7,987 seats, garnering just over 61 percent of the popular vote (roughly the same percentage as 2002). The SRP won 2,671 seats capturing 25.5 percent of the popular vote -- a marked increase for the SRP compared with its 2002 results. The NRP and FUNCINPEC combined totaled roughly 6 percent, while the remaining votes were scattered among the many small parties or were disqualified. End Summary.

#### NEC Results Announced

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¶2. (U) On April 25 and only one day behind the National Election Committee's schedule, the NEC announced the final results of the April 1 commune elections. There were no surprises, as each party had collected preliminary results from their respective party monitors within a week of the election. The CPP won 7,987 seats, garnering just over 61 percent of the popular vote (roughly the same percentage as 2002). The SRP won 2,671 seats capturing 25.5 percent of the popular vote -- a marked increase for the SRP compared with its 2002 results. The NRP and FUNCINPEC combined totaled roughly 6 percent. While FUNCINPEC won two commune chief positions and the NRP won none, the total number of commune councilors won by FUNCINPEC (274) was less than that won by the NRP (425). The CPP immediately recognized the results of the election while the SRP complained that the opposition would not accept the results due to the many irregularities and the NEC's rejection of all the SRP's complaints. Voter turnout for the elections was approximately 65 percent, an all-time low for nationwide elections in Cambodia since 1993.

#### NRP Looks Ahead; Royalists Consider Uniting

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3 (U) In the aftermath of the elections, the parties have been analyzing the results and considering ways to strengthen their respective positions in advance of the national elections slated for July 2008. Now that each party has a baseline of recent voter support as evidenced by the April 1 results, all are looking to maximize their chances in 2008 --

for the CPP, the focus is on splitting the opposition and enforcing party discipline to keep CPP voters on side. For the non-ruling parties, the theme of most discussions centers on the pros/cons of joining forces with either the CPP or other parties. One party has already clarified its position.

The small royalist party, Sangkum Chietiniyum Front Party, of Prince Sisowath Thomico, announced its intention to merge with Ranariddh's party in an effort to unify the royalists; a congress is planned this month to formalize the arrangement, which has been welcomed by the NRP. Ranariddh also has been in discussions with the SRP to form an alliance against the CPP, which Rainsy initially accepted but then indicated that his party might work just as easily with the CPP following the 2008 elections. The apparent flip-flop was explained by SRP sources as a means by which the SRP would not openly confront the CPP, thereby preserving the safety of its activists. Some SRP members assure us privately that Rainsy is adamant about reinvigorating an alliance of all opposition parties; one other SRP official, however, told us that Rainsy may indeed cut a deal with the CPP at some future point.

14. (SBU) FUNCINPEC held a workshop following the election to survey the results of the commune council polling, which saw FUNCINPEC support drop to an all-time low -- even falling behind the NRP. The April 21-22 seminar reportedly was a somber event, with 300 people attending. Preceding the start of the workshop was news of the defection of FUNCINPEC MP Ly Thuch to the CPP, an exodus which many predicted would continue up to the 2008 elections. Given the dismal showing of FUNCINPEC on April 1, sources within the party agree that most current FUNCINPEC MPs will likely move to either the CPP or SRP before the elections -- the two leading parties following April 1. FUNCINPEC attendees at the workshop blamed internal party rifts, FUNCINPEC's unclear strategy, irregular contact between the national party headquarters and

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the grassroots supporters, and the NEC's biased policies for the party's poor showing.

15. (SBU) In response to Prince Ranariddh's suggestion that the royalists unite against the CPP, Minister for Rural Development and FUNCINPEC First VP Lu Lay Sreng publicly invited the Prince to return to FUNCINPEC with the title of honorary president -- an invitation that the Prince rejected prior to creating the Norodom Ranariddh Party (NRP) in late 2006. Prince Ranariddh again rejected the invitation, and organized a meeting of followers in Malaysia recently, which some FUNCINPEC members attended. Although the basis of the meeting was to brainstorm about ways for Ranariddh to return to Cambodia, discussions reportedly also centered on alliances with other parties -- the SRP, FUNCINPEC, and yes -- even a return to partnership with the CPP. We understand that Lu Lay Sreng has also requested a face-to-face meeting with Ranariddh, which senior NRP officials are quietly trying to arrange.

Fuzzy Math Gives SRP Ambitious Hopes for 2008  
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16. (SBU) In an April 27 meeting with A/DCM, SRP Secretary General Mu Sochua complained that the National Election Committee rejected the SRP's election-related complaints or claimed that they more properly fell under the jurisdiction of the courts. Most worrisome has been that three newly elected commune chiefs have had legal cases brought against them that the SRP believes are politically motivated. Mu Sochua also complained that her request to discuss better cooperation between the SRP and the CPP on decentralization was met with disinterest by her CPP counterpart, Say Chhum. Rainsy went to see DPM Sok An, but PM Hun Sen later instructed Rainsy to send a letter to the Ministry of Interior, which has oversight for the implementation of the RGC's decentralization program. Sar Kheng reportedly has agreed to meet with Rainsy on the opposition leader's return from Europe.

17. (SBU) Sochua indicated that Rainsy's main goal is to see a unified opposition going into the 2008 elections. Recent conversations with Kem Sokha have been productive, and she said that both Rainsy and Kem Sokha agreed to a "verbal ceasefire" and will not publicly attack one another while discussions continue. The "Kem Sokha factor" in the 2008 elections remains unclear, but ideally the SRP would like to have the former NGO leader inside the SRP tent, and not competing against it. She said that Rainsy welcomed Prince Norodom Ranariddh's agreement to a united front, and noted that the Prince's absence from the country will have a negative effect on NRP support in 2008. Asked about SRP prospects for continuing to gain support against the CPP, Mu Sochua said that Rainsy sees reason to believe that a united opposition in 2008 can win, given the 50 percent plus one rule. She explained that following the 2002 commune elections, the CPP won about 61 percent of the popular vote -- not unlike this time. In the 2003 national elections, however, the CPP's level of voter support dropped to 47 percent. She predicted that the 2008 national elections would see a similar lowering of vote support for the CPP, and if it dropped to only 47 percent, the CPP would be unable to form a government. A uniting of all non-CPP parties could therefore win the elections if no one agreed to a coalition with the CPP, she argued.

18. (SBU) Sochua defended the notion that support for the CPP would drop substantially for the 2008 election because she claimed the fundamental nature of the commune and national elections is different. For the commune elections, she argued, there is more local pressure on people to vote for the CPP as the grassroots network of CPP officials is so strong and some local CPP officials are admittedly popular. There are consequences if the CPP does not win at the local level and therefore the pressure to support the ruling party is much stronger in the communes. However, for the national elections, the average CPP voter does not necessarily identify with the senior leaders and can change his/her vote if unhappy with national policies. She noted that many CPP voters are against the government's policies on land grabbing and the poor state of the judiciary. The SRP Secretary General believes that as happened in 2003, voter support for the CPP will dip during the national elections, and a strong opposition can do well -- well enough to win if all the non-ruling parties hold together.

Comment  
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19. (SBU) The political buzz and maneuvering in the aftermath of the April 1 elections is in high pitch. Initially, the opposition parties were all talking of a unified democratic front. More recently, we have heard that everyone is talking about a possible alliance with the CPP. Even Rainsy reportedly is unsure that if he did win, he could govern the country -- and is weighing the prospect of a possible partnership with the CPP. While the other non-ruling parties have parroted the same talking points about the need to form a united political front against the CPP, only the inconsequential Sangkum party of Prince Thomico has taken any tangible steps toward realizing that goal. All the others appear to be weighing their options before committing themselves to a particular path. Most agree, however, that any united front will need to announce itself well enough in advance of election day if such a front is to be successful in convincing voters that it can win. The six-month mark before the elections (i.e., February 2008) seems to be the time when all sources agree that the serious dealing will take place. However, while all the parties have talked tough about the need to unite, all are also apparently considering how they might join a CPP-led government -- making it clear that a unified opposition will not be any easier to achieve in 2008 than it was in 2003 or any earlier

period. End Comment.

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